

## [Henry and Rosa Maddox]

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HENRY and ROSA MADDOX

The home of Henry and Rosa Maddox is in one of the most isolated spots in the squatter region. After following the highway some three miles from the / village, one must travel along a tortuous dirt "grade" for six or seven miles. An abrupt turn eastward on a dim woods' trail leads over the prairie to a dense bayhead. Following the bayhead's curve, the trail ends suddenly where the bayhead makes a horseshoe bend. A narrow foot path leads around the bend to an opening in the swamp, marked by a blaze upon a small [bay?] tree. Bordering the swamp are pools of stagmant water and growths of cattails and arrowheads.

From the blazed tree a narrow path of logs and planks laid in the mud leads into the heart of the swamp, and ends in a raised clearing. The clearing is hemmed in on all sides by a tangle of underbrush, vines, and palms. In the center of the clearing stands the Maddox home, a rude palmetto-thatched shelter raised upon four tall poles.

Henry and Rose were both at home, and extended a pleasant greeting. Henry stated that we would have to sit upon the worn and rustic beaches outside the shelter, as the bed, a trunk, and a bench holding bowl and pitcher left no room for seats inside the shelter.

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"We try to keep our home neat and clean so as to keep down the flies and ants," said Henry. "We are careful about fires and waste paper, for even the swamp here can catch fire in very dry weather. We keep all our waste paper in this old tin and we burn all our food scraps. There are naturally lots of insects here and we have to fight them all the time. 2 The mosquitoes are bad and we always use the net for the bed."

The camp fire was carefully guarded by wire netting, and a crude stand held cooking utensils, tin cups and plates. A large iron pot swung from a tripod nearby.

"We find plenty of wood in the swamp and always keep a supply on hand so we won't be caught short," said Henry, indicating a neat pile of wood, and kindling in a tin basket.

Henry and Rosa wore clean clothes, though they were patched and faded. "I have just finished my washing down by the lake," said Rosa shyly but pleasantly. "See, out there, you can see the lake from here by bending over this way a little more. It is more cleared there and water is handier and I find it easier to wash the clothes. The lake water is soft and makes washing easy. I don't iron much. We get along all right without ironing our everyday clothes. I like the / clothes with the sun in em, and ironing seems to take away that good smell they have just off the line on a sunny day."

Henry talked of farming and spoke with pride of his farm around the lake shore. "I wish all that land was mine, then I would have me a real farm. I've always dreamed of having a farm way out some place like this all my life. Whoever owns all this land is lucky, even if he doesn't know it, 'to own so much. Isn't it queer that some people have so much land and never seem to care for it while others would be so happy to own even a little spot?"

Henry stated that both he and Rosa were born in New Jersey about 3 forty years ago and that after their marriage Rosa continued her work in the factory where she made piano keys. At that time Henry and his father had an electric shop and devoted most of their time to radio work. He said that they were both experts and could repair any make of radio and

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could build many of the various kinds. He learned his trade in the Navy and was proud of it, he said.

Henry and his father had a flourishing business for some time, but due to lax methods and too much credit to customers they were forced out of business at a loss, he said. He then secured work in the factory with Rosa. She was on straight time and made fifteen dollars a week, he was on a time basis in the electrical department and averaged twenty-five dollars a week. His father was so broken in health through the business failure that he was no longer able to work, and so made his home with them.

Speaking of the money they made, Henry said: "We did not save much, though we always had the idea of a farm in mind. But we had a nice apartment, went to shows, had good clothes and a fine car, the wreck of which you can see just outside the entrance to our swamp.

"I went to school," he continued, "and so did Rosa, and we both had good educations so we thought. I never could see why they make such a fuss about education, for after all it doesn't mean much but reading and writing and a little general information. If ever a person learns more than that I've yet to hear of it. Of course there are some sciences and professions that require more education. But a person has it in them to be what they are, and education does little good. Now I learned the electrical trade through work and experience in the Navy, so what good 4 would an education in school in that have done me? Take Rosa there, she learned her trade working in the factory and no education would have made her the expert that she was. We had a natural talent for this work or we couldn't have learned it."

Rosa said they had no children the first years of their marriage and then when they found out how sick she really was they took care to have none. "It wouldn't have been fair to us or the children to bring them into the world and I probably wouldn't have lived through it anyway. I was always frail and delicate as a child but we thought nothing of it. Mother

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said I was growing too fast though I never grew to much size, as you can see. Sometimes when I was working I would feel so tired and sick seemed like I just couldn't go on but I just accepted it as part of my nature."

She said that she finally became so ill that she gave way at the factory and had to go to a hospital. The doctor said it was anemic and prescribed a special diet and regular treatments. She did not like the diet and felt she did not have time to see the doctor regularly, so as soon as she felt a little better she gave it all up and returned to her work.

Finally they saved a little money and decided to come to Florida and get a farm. Someone had told them that the Florida sunshine would cure Rosa's trouble without medicine or diet, and they also heard of the rich farming lands of the Everglades. The extreme isolation of the Everglades appealed to them so greatly that they with Henry's father and a few personal effects started out in their car for Florida. At that time they considered their car a fine one, but it did not stand up under the trip, and consequently they spent most all their money before arriving at their destination. 5 Finally they stopped at a little village and as finances were short, Henry secured a few day's work. His employer told them of land near at hand where they could move right in and not have any rent to pay.

"In a few days we drove out to see the land and found what we thought was a good piece for farming. It was quite a ways off the grade but we didn't mind that for we wanted to be way out in the woods. So we moved there and first built a shelter like this one only we slept on [beds?] of pine boughs and palmetto leaves for a time. I hoed up some of the land and managed to clear out the roots, then got seed and catalogues from New Jersey and did just as they said but didn't have much success. Things just wouldn't grow.

"Finally things got so bad that I had to get some work in the village, but that was not what we wanted. We wanted a farm. Finally, I managed to get a little lumber by working for a sawmill, and built a little two-room house. Pa had one room and we the other. We cooked out in the open just as we do now. Part of this time I worked on FERA but I didn't like that

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either for as I said I wanted to farm. I decided to look for a better place and when I found this location we moved right in. We just took what we could carry in the car. Didn't have much to leave behind anyway and we could not move the house even if we tore it down. This has suited us exactly and we wouldn't think of moving.

“Pa died and we had to borrow money for his expenses and that was hard to do for we hardly knew anybody. The doctor helped us by taking Pa to his hospital without any payment and he helped us to borrow money. We are still trying to [pay?] it back but don't make much headway because cash is so scarce. I might get a job in town, but we like it out here too much. 6 It might be better for Rosa's health if we moved in town where she could have fresh meat and milk, but she doesn't like that life either and she would not take the diet when she could have it before we came down here, so why move when this is just what we have always wanted? This land around the lake and in the swamp is much better than the white sand for farming. Water is easier to get here, too. We drink the lake water and use it for all our needs, why not? It's as pure as any city water, and costs us nothing. What few vegetable I raise I usually manage to sell and that suits us better than to eat them, for then I can buy some fresh meat and milk for Rosa. Rosa thinks her anemia is aggravated by this location, but doesn't want to move. So we've tried to study diets for anemia to make things as good for her as possible. I have wanted to get a cow but haven't had the money. Thought a man was going to let me have one for her feed for awhile but when he found out how far out we live and in the swamp he wouldn't let us have her. Said a cow would die in the swamp. I don't see why, we have lived here quite awhile and it hasn't hurt us any.”

Henry spoke vaguely of paying some attention to the phases of the moon when planting. “I put in my crops at regular times and pay no attention to the climate here. Get all my seeds and information from New Jersey. Some people say I should follow the native methods but I don't know much about them and don't want to ask. If I ask anyone they would be sure to

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start coming out here to see how I am getting along and we do not care for visitors nor any interference with our ways.”

They stated that they did not go to church as they lived so far away and then, too, they didn't like the crowds. They like to read, especially 7 fiction and western stories, and often read magazines through a second time, then carefully save them for fuel. Henry would like to have enough money to buy parts to make a radio. “We do not bother with the newspapers for the news is stale when we get them. There is nothing much to interest us anyway, for what the other fellow is doing is no concern of ours.

Politics don't interest us either[,?] though along about election time I try to find out what my party is doing and I always vote its way in national matters. I don't fool with local politics. What are they to me? Guess the men my party selects are always qualified for the positions or they wouldn't be chosen by the party. I never talk politics; it does no good and seems such a waste of time. A fellow won't change his views just on account of talk and often gets mad, and it's just too much trouble.

“We like the isolation and the quiet here. We both enjoy this life and the natural surroundings so much we feel that it more than makes up for any little luxuries we might have in town. Even if we had plenty of money I think we would continue to live out here. There is so much more to this life than many people would think. Take that fringe of blue flag lilies along the lake over there, there's nothing so pretty in the cities and that is just one of the many things. After all, one might as well have the kind of life he likes for that is about all that counts anyway.”